Virtual and Literary Representations of Inclusion and Adaptation of the "Other" in Children's books of the recent decade in Greece

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Résumé : *Le papier actuel se concentre sur l'étude de la description du petit « autre » dans les albums de la littérature d'enfants qui ont été édités en Grèce après 2004. Plus spécifiquement, les diverses descriptions du petit « autre », l'immigré, la personne qui est différente sont examinées de manière approfondie et notre attention se porte principalement sur ses caractéristiques externes, les rôles qu'il est invité à entreprendre, les activités auxquelles il participe, ses relations aux autres membres du groupe ou à la société en général comme ils sont enregistrés non seulement dans le code linguistique du texte mais principalement dans le code d'illustration ce qui est habituellement surabondant dans les livres d'enfants illustrés.*

Mots-clés : *Autre, Albums, Littérature d'enfants*

Abstract: *The present paper focuses on the studying of the depiction of the little "other" in the illustrated books of Children's Literature that have been published in Greece after 2004. More specifically, the various depictions of the little "other", the immigrant, the person who is different are closely examined and our attention mainly focuses on his / her external features, the roles he / she is asked to undertake, the activities he / she participates in, his / hers relations to the other members of the group or to society in general as they are registered not only in the linguistic code of the text but mainly in the illustrative code which is usually overabundant in the illustrated children's books.*

Key words: *Other, Illustrated books, Children literature*

Objective and specific comments

The children's literary books influence in more than one way the children's standards and attitudes regarding adults since both the social and political reality as well as ideology are reflected in them (Hunt, 1991). Various readings of illustration which are defined in the section of methodology bring in the foreground the component elements of an approach that views both the literary text and the illustration as a tank of social practices (Bresson, 1981: 185-197) and ways of wondering about issues that specifically concern stereotypes and characteristic features of the little "other".

Consequently the study of both the illustrative and the textual depictions of the little "other" in the field of the illustrated children's book which regards and usually has a child of a certain age mainly as recipient, may contribute to the understanding of unclear social procedures as well as the ways of a human behavior they include, that is, stereotypes, attitudes, values and perceptions (Karasavvidou, 1998). It is also understandable that the procedure of depicting the world in general and more specifically the world of the little "other" that is attempted through the illustration and the literary text cannot be seen as a neutral representation of the social reality but as a reproductive mechanism of the prevailing culture and the social hierarchy (Kanatsouli, 2000). To be specific the code of children's illustration owns strategies and techniques which can easily persuade about what is evident and really reasonable which naturally becomes more easily accepted, in other words, it doesn't resists the filter of dispute, because is enlisted in the category of Children's Literature.

Nineteenth (19) children's books with illustrations by Greek writers and illustrators which have been published after 2000 have been selected and analyzed. The publication of children's books focusing on the issue of immigrants occurs mainly after the crucial decade of 1990-2000 when immigrants in large numbers came to Greece. Children's Literature very quickly processes in a myth poetic manner at first the social impact of immigration in several children's novels and then attempts to do the same with books that have a double code of narration (both illustrative and textual) and refer to younger ages. Under the term illustrated children's books one can include various distinct categories the boundaries of which can easily be confused. Based on previous attempts of defining and classifying the Greek children's books with illustrations first of all the category "illustrated children's book" is distinguished. In the category of the "illustrated book" the picture actually interprets or portrays indicatively certain and usually main issues or patterns of the text of the book (Giannikopoulou, 2006). On the exactly opposite side, there is another easily- distinguished category of children's books with illustrations which includes the widely known "picture books". In these books the prevailing formalistic feature is the collaboration between the illustrative and textual (linguistic) code in a relevant environment of equivalence or rather relative equivalence with variations of favoring the one or the other side respectively. It is easily understood that between these two categories of children's books with pictures there are several cases of children's books with pictures leaning however not clearly enough, towards the side of both the picture book and the illustrated book. It is worth mentioning that in the category of the picture book there are exceptional cases of books in which the role of the picture is so direct and determining that it completely eliminates the respective role of the language, in other words, there is no linguistic text or even if there is any, its role is limited to titles or optional subtitles to the illustrations. In these cases the predominance of the term *picture - narrative* is obvious (Karakitsios, 1991: 24).

In essence, the books belonging to the above mentioned categories are the combination of two different codes, the code of the language and the code of the picture. However, the qualitative and quantitative presence of the picture is the determining factor in the depiction of the meaning and the topic of the book. The role and significance of the picture in the thematic development of the book

is a complex, intricate procedure that either follows at times the philosophy of portraying the meanings of the text actually strengthening it or at other times it takes the text to higher levels forwarding it to new different ways of reading.

In general all the categories of children's books with pictures apply to children of 3-9 years old and they are considered easy reading matter (Kalogirou, 2001). It is obvious that the scarce presence of illustration in an illustrated book turns it almost instinctively into reading material for older children while the excessive presence of pictures makes the book reading material for little children who do not possess developed reading skills. The pictures, in this case, operate as vehicles carrying meanings and concepts. The little children readers express themselves more easily through pictures, in other words, they stage figuratively their emotions and thoughts (Anagnostopoulou, 2004 : 190-202).

1. Social dimensions

The portrayal of the "other", "the different" in the field of mythopoeism is a complex procedure characterized by two main course-phases. Initially the image of "the other" is obscure, unstable and it is easily affected by the creative skill of every writer and the surrounding environment. However, gradually this image through various mutually effective processes between the reading public and the text is turned into a generalization, it is simplified, stabilized and very often it becomes a national or cultural stereotype. As it is expected, the course towards the simplification becomes subject to disorderly and often uncontrollable influences but usually the outcome seems to be planned in advance or at least to be moving within the boundaries of reality as this is defined mainly by the surrounding atmosphere and the expectations of the citizens-members of society. Nowadays such generalizing procedures form a particularly intricate, complex net of mutual, excessive feedbacks that is expressed in a very distinct way mainly through the powerful mass media. Besides all the other symbolic forms of expression and description literature has significantly contributed and still contributes to the operation of this net mainly because it can, unlike the mass media which work intensively and in short term, carry and impress in the long term the image of the 'foreigner'. The literary myth lasts longer and the literary character stays more safely and less superficially in the mind of the reader (Pageaux, 1988 : 133-160, Oikonomou – Agorastou, 1992).

The above mentioned remarks carry a different weight on the cases where the children's literary books refer to texts that are corporate in the wider family of children's literature and are strongly supported by pictures as it happens with the illustrated books and the picture books. In specific, where are two different forms of narration or depiction (illustrative or linguistic) that always coexist in different degrees of collaboration and which name their own principles, reasoning, techniques along with a completely different way of operating and influencing the young reader. The illustrative stereotype is supported on a signifier – signified relationship that is completely different from that in the linguistic system. As for the picture the signifier- signified relationship is based on imitation as well as on analogy without limitations. In the language system this relationship is arbitrary (Barthes, 1964 : 40-51). The above mentioned difference allows the picture to

both portray easily and be authentic since it shows clearly and does not imply (Escarpit, 1984 : 69-93).

Moreover, in the works of mythopoeism for children the narration act itself takes place almost always through people and heroes that usually belong to dipolar systems of good vs evil, hero vs antihero, 'ours' vs 'foreign' since the heroes, as it happens in the fairy tales not only lack depth but also are characterized by an incurable inflexibility and superficial. This is so due to reasons that are related not so much to the folk traditional narration principles but to the particular conditions that allow and regulate the procedure in which children comprehend a literary text (Schwenke – Wyile, 2001).

Finally, the child consists a public social symbol bearing multiple social and personal projections as well as emotional changes since childhood is 'created' by the expectations, hopes and fears that societies have projected upon the face of the child. Therefore, it is easily seen that writing in the works of Children Literature is defined by additional conditions. For example, it makes sense the fact that each creator-writer on the one hand, incorporates, shapes and transforms elements of the subconscious and the collective imaginary as well as the dreams and ideas of the social groups in general and of the prevailing one in particular. On the other hand, however, the writer moves within his/her personal boundaries. These boundaries concern the writer's private self-criticism and self-censorship (conscious or not) as well as the school (national) and educational ideology, which require to be handled in a non-ordinary way in the Greek society. According to the official statistic data (*Employment Institution Publications* - G.S.E.E.: Athens, 2007), the immigrants in Greece represent the 7% of the total population and almost the double of the work force, that is 12%. In their majority, the immigrants come from Albania (57,5%). Most of them have come to Greece to work or to re-unite their families. 70% of them are married. In the years 1998-2004 296.300 work places were offered, of which 162.200 places were covered by Greeks and 134.100 places by immigrants. 41% of the immigrating population has lived in Greece five years ago and only 12% of them arrived here during the last year. If the two urban centers of Athens and Thessaloniki which concentrate a great number of immigrants are excluded, then the immigrants' distribution seems balanced. It is known that the measures the Greek state took to inform the young people about immigration etc are characterized insufficient. Consequently the young people from their opinion about the foreigners based either on their own personal experience or in the mass media and on their family environment. Therefore, the operation of both the figurative and literary depictions through the illustrated children's books becomes extremely significant. However, during the last years the educational system at a very slow, hesitating pace made a few systematic, organized attempts by establishing new institutions such as the immigrant reception schools or the classes of immigrant integration. It has also initiated great research in education which is defined by the term of intercultural education.

2. Methodology, research material

In order to analyze the illustration we have used the method of *context analysis* combined with simple principles of the *theory of narration* necessary as the

main tool of methodologically approaching the texts and finally we have chosen four main categories:

a. External (natural) appearance, state and gender (particular external features, hairstyle, clothes etc of the immigrant).

b. Activities and undertaken role, supplementary accessories.

c. The kind of narration and the point of view with which not only the text but also the picture is focused on (Genette, 1972).

d. Moreover the text reading was based on tools taken from the field of *cultural iconology* and social anthropology. Cultural iconology, "imagologie", is a system of thought that views the literary text as a document, a testimony that refers to the "foreigner" or the "other". Taking specific steps and going through certain phases it examines the images – usually structured ones – of the "foreigner" and his civilization based on the structure of the text at different levels: the level of words, of the prioritization of relations of the scenario and of the thematic patterns (Guyard, 1988, Ampatzopoulou, 2001 : 90-96).

The 19 books that constitute our research material are the following:

1. *My name is Promise*, Elena Artzanidou, illustration Vassilis Grivas, (Athens: Psichogios, 2006).

2. *Give the Love*, Aggeliki Varela, illustration Maro Alexandrou, (Athens: Patakis, 2004).

3. *Xenoulis*, text and illustration Giouta Georgia, (Thessaloniki: 2004).

4. *Let's take another picture,* text and illustration Popi Diakenisaki,(Athens: Kedros, 2003).

5. *Sabina, Moenia and the colors*, Vissaria Zorba-Rammopoulou, illustration Dimitris Karatzaferis, (Athens: Akritas, 2003).

6. *Melpo, the one and only*, text and illustration Maria Rousaki, (Athens: Papadopoulos, 2002).

7. *Black sky with pink clouds*, Kostas Haravas, illustration Maria Tsafadaki, (Athens: Patakis, 2004).

8. *Three palms spread the earth all around*, Maria Papagianni, illustration Apostolos Karageorgiou, (Athens: Patakis, 2005).

9. *Good morning friend*, Filio Nikoloudi, illustration Ferena Skordi, (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2006).

10. *Rico, Rico, Kokoriko*, text and illustration Froso Hatoglou, (Athens: Militos. 2004).

11. *A worm with....wings*, text and illustration Lida Varvarousi, (Athens: Papadopoulos, 2006).

12. *A warm hearted shark,* text and illustration Lida Varvarousi, (Athens: Papadopoulos, 2001).

13. *A fish that did not know how to swim,* text and illustration Lida Varvarousi, (Athens: Papadopoulos, 2004).

14. *The little dog that has lost his spots*, Dina Marmara-Dagioglou, illustration Despina Karamanou, (Thessaloniki: Sichronoi Orizontes, 2002).

15. *Blushy the red star*, M. karagianni, illustration M. Pepona, (Athens: Diaplasi, 2004).

16. *The White and Dark Chocolate*, Lena Christidi, illustration Ersi Spathopoulou, (Athens: Anemomylos, 2002).

17. *The happy prairie*, Filio Nikoloudi, illustration Sophia Fortoma, (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2002).

18. *The flower called Harlekin*, Vivi Matsuka, illustration Maria Pepona, (Athens: Portokali, 2001).

19. *Different Friends, Shape and Color*, text and illustration Libertini, (Athens: Patakis, 1995).

3. Analysis-Conclusions

1st Observation (Groupings and orientations)

Two groups of illustrated books and picture books are formed and their theme is the image of the little "other" and his/her uniqueness. In one group we have stories in which animals with anthropomorphic behavior and usually realistic, clear features are the protagonists. In other words, an animal, such as a little dog, a shark, a worm or even a rooster, is both portrayed and plays a leading role. Along with the animal we can see a personified natural element, such as a little star, a flower or a product like milk, cocoa or something like a shape also playing a leading role.

Of the 19 books of the research material, five books, the ones numbered 10 to14 (Appendix) have personified anthropomorphic animals as protagonists while in the same group there are also other five books, the ones numbered 15 to 19, in which the leading role is played by natural elements or phenomena such as a flower, a star, a chocolate bar –in other words- by natural elements characterized by complete anthropomorphic representation combined with respective personification at the level of symbolization. The protagonists belong to the group of weak people who, when having the leading role (in both illustration and the text) may not allow for an easy identification but can at least open the doors to a convenient approach and familiarization for the reader or the under age reader. The little reader in these stories sees a small or a big animal with which she/he can easily identify. Moreover she/he can see reality without too many reservations when facing different situations involving personified natural elements or objects. The reader's animistic way of thinking allows for a faster process of Identification with all the natural elements. In his animistic frame of mind he can mobilize them in any way he wishes and he also believes that he can control them in an indirect way. As a result, according to the outcome of the story, the reader actually feels the symbolic victory of the little animal or the little natural element upon his enemies.

In the second group of illustrated books and picture books the heroes are little elementary school children, whose behavior, reactions, manner of speaking and their actions take place within the frame of school reality although this is not openly stated but it is usually implied either indirectly or directly. It is usually a school classroom, school grounds or an urban square the setting upon which the heroes move and breathe unlike the previous stories in which the presence of the protagonists –elements or natural elements- would create settings inaccessible to men, almost unreal, irrational for example the seabed, the sky etc. in these books the story of a little child that comes to Greece as an immigrant is described in a realistic way.

The above mentioned category of books is the most indicative one regarding intentions since almost always the protagonists' descriptions show actual scenes of the modern, about to be multicultural reality of the Greek society. In an almost stereotyped way the problems the little immigrant faces within the educational system with its relevant stiffness and weaknesses are described

(Dragona, Fragoudaki, 1998). There is also a constant depiction of the difficulties the Greek students face in accepting at first and then understanding the "other" with his singularities and choices. Then, of course, everything changes, within the process of gradual familiarization, contact, co-existence and communication with the "other".

2nd observation (External features)

In all the selected books we can clearly distinguish certain descriptive choices which insist on the heroes' realistic depiction in such a way that the descent or the country of the origin is clearly stated. For example, Promise, in the book *My name is Promise* is portrayed with features that clearly denote her African origin, that is black, curly hair, dark complexion, an oval-shaped face, her nose and lips being described in an relaxed but also distinct emphatic way that combines colors and shapes. The latter characteristics actually refer us to the depiction of a Negro face. Something similar seems to be distinguished in the heroine from Africa in the book *Three palm spreads the earth all around* where illustration follows the simple stereotyped reasoning of stressing external features that indicate the differences between the Greeks and the foreigners. For example, the African girl, Hatzuavi, has got dark skin and black eyes, while the Greek girl, Anna, is faired-colored with light brown eyes (picture 1).

The same rationale regarding depiction with the same choices seems to occur in the depiction of the external characteristic of heroes of European origin as it happens in the case of the Polish Jianus in *Give the Love*, of the Serb Goran in *Pink clouds in the sky,* of the Albanian girl, Daniela and the other children from Asia who have little or almost no participation in the story-plot of the books. In these cases what seems to prevail is a typical, verisimilitude portraying reasoning which bearing the argument of realistic depiction selects all those features that will support the easy classification and categorization of the various versions of the little "other". For example, the Polish Jianus, will be portrayed bearing the obvious features of the prevailing type of his country, that is blue eyes, blond hair, fair-colored-figurative elements, which, in other words, refer directly to the Polish stereotype (picture 2). The same thing happens with the Serb Goran who bears the respective figurative facial characteristics in order to resemble the Serbian original and in particular the Serb target of the 2000 bombardments (picture 3). In opposition to the above there are no external differences to immigrants coming from Albania like Daniela. Undisputedly, these choices are based on the reasoning of the stereotyped depiction. However, they also bear the justification of the realistic description of the different versions of the little "other".

A lot more interesting beside its relevant illustrative stereotype is the frequent depiction of the little "other" when feeling embarrassed with his arms folded at the front, his body having taken a defensive position as he is looking down with a speak of worry on his face. These characteristics define a specific child-type that is different from the rest of the other average-typed children (picture 4). Alongside with these stereotyped in some way depictions there are standard expressions and words that denote the difference and diminish the personality of the little other. Expressions like "*he is black, so he is naive, he doesn't speak*

like us, so he is different" set boundaries between the little "other" and the Greek children.

As far as the books in which natural elements or animals are the protagonists things are different it has been noticed that the depiction of the personified natural elements, the little star, the flower as well as that of the anthropomorphic animals is based on a significantly critical characteristic that is sufficient enough to convey the difference. For example the flower has a peculiar purple color in *The flower called Harlekin*, the star in the *Blushy*, the shark in the *Warm-hearted Shark* almost resembles a dolphin with tigers stripes. The choice of descriptive elements is characterized by the tendency to seek and construct new figures that slightly refer to the typical or traditional natural elements or animals that are protagonists. When animals are portrayed in illustrations as heroes then the removal of what is real is chosen and emphasis is put on anthropomorphic characteristics that other readability to the picture. At the same time there is intense projection on the imaginary which distorts not only the outlines and the shapes but also the perspective and the depth that is a specific tendency in (Greek) illustration (Asonitis, 2001).

3rd observation (Roles' depictions)

The above mentioned comments are directly related to the third observation that follows. The various versions of the little "other" are depicted in very specific activities as well as in well-defined roles. At first they are usually portrayed while being accepted or being rejected by the class, while they communicate with the teacher and finally as they co-exist in class, as they participate in games in the school yard during the break (pictures 5 & 6). The last case puts the seal in her own way on the clear prevalence of the option of a fortunate and happy end that defines most of the children's books.

Essential information regarding the system in which immigrants were received is not recorded in any other book but for the book of A. Varela *Give the Love*. In general Greek state was unprepared and this is depicted in an obvious way in the children's books in which the main concern is to stress the elements of difference which, however, gradually disappear bringing everything to a fortunate, happy end with all the problems of integration being solved. It is evident than an optimistic conception regarding the tolerance and acceptance of the little "other" in the Greek educational system in specific and in the Greek society in general is displayed. This last comment is directly related to the abundant presence of mixed pictures showing clearly the passage from denial and dissimilitude to the universal acceptance and assimilation since the immigrant students start resembling more and more their Greek schoolmates. Traces of integration are detected only in the *Good morning friend* an in *Give the Love*.

The fact that no plan or at least some kind of perspective regarding either the incorporation or the co-existence of the little "other" in the Greek society is not displayed can also be easily seen in the children's novels that were published in the previous decade, 1990-2000. Everything seems to stop with the acceptance of the little "other" within the framework of friendship and the game but at

least some signs of co-existence and integration can be distinguished. Some characteristic examples of that development are met in *Give the Love* where we can faintly see the first signs of a multicultural school and a respective Greek multicultural society. Regardless of this development the dilemma of integration or assimilation is neither clearly posed nor replied to in any way, on the contrary to what usually happens in a children's novel where the answer is clear and the assimilation is declared.

4th observation (Illustrative perspectives and focuses)

In all books that have animals or natural elements as heroes the narration both in text and the illustration is in the third-person narrative with omniscient point of view. The book of L. Varvarousi *A little fish that didn't know how to swim* is the only exception. A heterodiegetic textual narrator, telling other people's stories with omniscient point of view can recount in completely neutral manner the works, the actions and the words of the others. At the same time there is a respective illustrative narrator who depicts himself almost the same story breathing life into it with lines, shapes and colors. All the characters of the story invade the pages of the book and reader is directed to all portrayed people in turn. It seems that the narrative techniques of this kind befit to some extend the little children's psychology and may possibly respond to the skills and experiences of the little readers. The narrator's stability and certainty cause fewer problems regarding both comprehension and the following of the story-plot. More specifically the stability in the flow of the narration as well as the narrator's absolute certainty are consistent with the children's special features. Besides the popular folk story telling has chosen these narrative techniques for several years with the exception of the last 50 years.

In the books where a typical little immigrant is the protagonist, that is in the books numbered one (1) to nine (9), the protagonist's portrayals as well as the descriptions either of his little or his great adventures are filtered either by the first-person narration or by the third-person narration with omniscient point of view, a procedure than influences the illustrative narrator sometimes completely or partially at other times. Thus the mixed or peculiar situations that are created or the disagreement between the two narrators can lead to various possible results. For example, in the books *My name is Promise, Give the Love* and *Good morning friend* we can see some interesting situations. In the first book specifically the illustrative narrator appears to be talking in the 3rd person with omniscient point of view despite the fact that the textual narrator appears to be talking in the first person and is characterized by inner focusing. In a characteristic page of the book *My name is Promise* (picture 7) what is depicted, is the group of children - schoolmates in the classroom that follows the heroine's look. According to the textual narrator it is the heroine who is looking and it is the look of Promise that is being depicted. But in another picture (8) we can see a mixed situation that reminds of techniques - loans from the comics (Martinidis, 1990). On the one side, the textual narrator (*My name is Promise*) recounts bearing on inner focusing, on the other side, the illustrative narrator both selects and recounts the events without any focusing. This, however, at the same time creates an illusion of inner focusing. The illustrative

portrayal of the father starts from bellow and follows an onward direction, just as little Promise would have seen it from below. In the book *Give the Love* the textual, omniscient third-person narrator agrees with the illustrative narrator (picture 9). In certain cases a mixed situation occurs. We see the simultaneous display of the looks of the hero and the third-person narrator since the narrator himself is depicted in the picture (picture 10).

In the book *Good morning friend* what is considered significant is that the narration is in the firs-person narrative and that the inner focusing in the text is accompanied by an inner focusing on illustration. That means that the point of view of the little child is always obvious in illustration. In this way reading becomes safer and rather easier for the little reader who sees illustration as a significant assistant in the comprehension of the meaning. Impressive are the cases (picture 11) where the depiction of the look of the little boy - narrator in the portrayal of the figurative reality is thought to be characteristic. In these pictures in specific we can see the use of the techniques from the comics. We can see something similar but to a smaller degree happening in the picture 9 where the height from which the inside of the room is viewed is identified with the look of the little hero - narrator.

The above mentioned observations allow for a series of thoughts. In specific when the linguistic and illustrative text co-exist and collaborate and the book reader is offered the ability to become a viewer of the illustration in the sense that he has the narration of the story spread in front of his eyes both in pictures and in words, that is in two different codes, then, we can easily assume that there is a pluralistic narration and the different attitudes and distances taken against the recounted material may possibly create different focuses. In cases when, however, the illustration is in conflict with the inner look of the display of events and follows different routes, then the game of communication is lost to a great degree. Then we see the prevalence of propaganda and the official views which are usually conservative positions expressed by the state. The fact that the textual and illustrative narrator as well as the inner focusing and the omniscient point of view are in conflict not only distorts the story but also makes the flow of the story harder. In addition to the above the difficult points of the story which are given in a textual form are decomposed and deconstructed instead of being strengthened as far as information concerned.
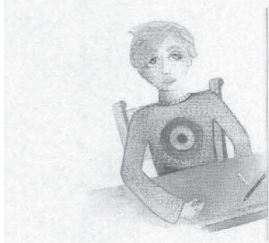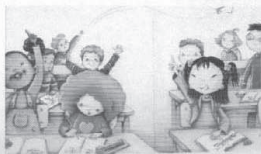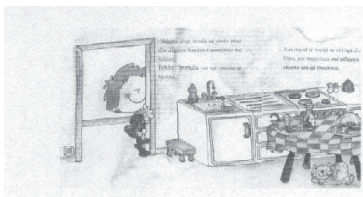
Appendix

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